

# Was Halley's Comet The "Star Of Jacob?" Comet's Appearances Coincided With Major Jewish Events

By Zecharia Sitchin

(Editor's Note: Zecharia Sitchin, a linguist and biblical scholar, is author of *The Twelfth Planet*, *The Stairway to Heaven* and most recently *The Wars of Gods and Men*.)

Halley's comet is here, creating understandable excitement. For most of us it is a once in a lifetime event. It is accompanied by an avalanche of books and articles dealing with all its aspects, including an enumeration of its past visitations, when its appearances were deemed to be

celestial omens foretelling major turns in the course of human events.

Most celebrated of the previous appearances is that of 1066, during the Battle of Hastings as a result of which England fell to Norman conquerors -- an appearance depicted on the remarkable Bayeaux tapestry. Another ominous appearance was in 1456, during the siege of Belgrade by the Turks.

Nowhere has it been mentioned thus far that Halley's comment was associated with major events in Jewish history.

### New Babylonian Discoveries

The principal reason for the omission must be the fact that until very recently, the only sources for recording the periodic appearances of comets, some of which must have been reappearances of Halley's Comet, were European and Chinese.

Edmond Halley, Britain's second Astronomer Royal, first observed the comet that would come to bear his name in 1682. He concluded that it was the same comet that had been seen in Europe (by Kepler) in 1607 and (by Apian) in 1531, and predicted that it would reappear at the end of 1758. When this did come to pass, the periodicity of the comet (between 75 to 80 years) was recognized, and earlier records of such appearances were studied with that discovery in mind.

Until recently, the earliest record of this comet was in Chinese astronomical observations. These included the appearance of a bright comet in 467 B.C.E. (also possibly recorded in Greece), and again in 240 B.C.E. There were Chinese and Roman observations in the year 12 B.C.E.

Until earlier this year, the return of Halley's comet in 164 B.C.E. was assumed on the basis of very vague Chinese records. But it was in April of 1985 that three scholars re-examining Babylonian astronomical tablets that had been lying in the basement of the British Museum since their discovery in Mesopotamia more than a century ago, discovered that the tablets referred several times to the appearances of extraordinary celestial bodies, apparently comets, in the years 164 B.C.E. and 87 B.C.E. -- a periodicity of 77 years!

The three (F.R. Stephenson, K.K.C. Yau and H. Hunger) reported their discovery in the prestigious scientific magazine *Nature*. Other scholars who have since examined the clay tablets from over 2,000 years ago tend to agree that the recording of the sightings describe a slow moving celestial body -- too slow to be a meteor and thus probably a comet.

### Hannukah -- in 164 B.C.E.!

The year 164 B.C.E., as none of the scholars and newsmen preoccupied with Halley's comet have realized, is of great significance in Jewish

history. Indeed, we are about to celebrate at this very time of the year what had happened then.

It was in that very year that the Macabees, under the leadership of Judah, recaptured Jerusalem and purified the defiled Temple. The rededication ceremony -- commemorated in the Festival of Hanukkah -- had thus taken place just when "Halley's Comet" was reaching the peak of its brightness, for all, Jew and Gentile, to see.

### The Revolt Against Rome

The year 66 C.E. is considered by astronomers to have been another one in which Halley's comet had made an appearance: this is based on at least two Chinese observations. But 66 C.E. was the year when the Jews of Judea launched the Great Revolt against Rome!

Indeed, Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, Book VI) blamed the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple on the misinterpretation by the Jews of the heavenly signs that preceded the revolt: "a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city and a comet that continued a whole year."

### Halley's Comet -- Jacob's Star?

The ancient Greeks readily admitted that the source of their knowledge of astronomy was Babylon; and the Babylonians drew their knowledge from the earlier civilization of Sumer, which blossomed out some 6,000 years ago.

Abraham, I have shown in my most recent book "The Wars of Gods and Men," called himself Ibrî ("Hebrew") because he had come from the Sumerian scientific-religious center later known as Nippur. It was there that the calendar we still use was first introduced, where knowledge of astronomy was repositied. The tales of the Hebrew Patriarchs indeed are replete with indications of familiarity with the heavens.

The Hebrew name for 'comet' is Kokhav shavit, "Sceptre Star." This has a direct bearing on the biblical tale of the seer Bilam. When the Israelites ended their wanderings of the Exodus and began the conquest of Canaan, the Moabite king summoned Bilam to accurse the Israelites. But Bilam, realizing that the Israelite advance was divinely ordained, blessed them instead. He did so, he explained, because he was shown a divine vision --

*I see it though not now,  
I behold it though it is not near:  
A star of Jacob shall course,  
A sceptre of Israel shall rise.  
(Numbers, 24:17).*

Did our forefathers deem "Halley's Comet" their "Sceptre Star?" Bilam, for sure, recognized it as the Star of Jacob and of the Children of Israel.

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